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Book Reviews.

The First Interpreters of Jesus. By GEORGE HOLLEY GILBERT, PH.D., D.D. New York: The Macmillan Co.; London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1901. Pp. xiii + 429. \$1.25.

In his preface Professor Gilbert has given an admirable statement of the problem of the biblical theologian:

His task is obviously historical, for it is nothing else than the investigation of a number of ancient Greek writings. The sole aim of the student who undertakes this task—and therefore our sole aim—is to learn the moral and religious views which these ancient Greek writings contain. It is not to defend these views. It is not to show their harmony or lack of harmony with the revelation of Jesus, or with the teaching of the church in subsequent ages. The solitary question with which we here approach these documents is the question of fact: What do they teach?

In seeking to answer this question, in so far as the apostolic literature is concerned, Professor Gilbert has produced a volume that deserves and will receive serious attention. Following somewhat at a distance the conventional divisions of his material, he treats of "The Teaching of Paul," "The Minor Writers," and "The Teaching of John," under the latter head including both the epistles and the Apocalypse. He does not seriously discuss the questions of introduction, and we are therefore left uncertain as to his general position, but it would seem as if he accepted generally the traditional position as to the authorship of the New Testament books, although it is impossible to decide just what his position on specific points may be. In this particular his work is somewhat disappointing, as it would seem as if one of the chief duties of the biblical theologian is to trace the development of the early interpretation of early Christianity quite as much as to give an accurate statement of the content of each book. In this, however, Professor Gilbert is not without the companionship of Professor Stevens.

It would, however, be unjust to say that Professor Gilbert's method is not historical. He frequently makes use of the Jewish literature, and his treatment of Paul, in consequence, is exceedingly clear. We cannot agree with his denial that Paul teaches the preëxistence of the Christ, as well as with his assertion that, while Paul teaches freedom

from the Mosaic law of works, he does not think of the Christian as free from all law. Yet, in the latter statement at least, our dissent concerns expression rather than meaning. Professor Gilbert does not find that Paul teaches a new nomism; he distinctly recognizes the new life of the believer as the heart of Paulinism, and traces its relations with characteristic clearness. Only occasionally does he seem to have been swayed by the peculiar temptation of biblical theologians, viz., the desire to discover what is today tenable rather than what the writer actually may have thought. His discussion of the book of Hebrews is full and helpful, though again without any question of the precise time of its composition, and therefore of its situation in the general development of Christian thought. The most elaborate treatment of the book, next to that of the thought of Paul, is that of the Apocalypse, which Professor Gilbert holds to be a discussion of the parousia of the Christ. His interpretation of the book is essentially eschatological, although he discovers Rome in the woman sitting on the seven mountains. Disregarding the critical questions concerning the integrity of the book, he regards it as a literary unit, in which is portrayed the conflict between Christians and their enemies and the consequent triumph of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Taken all together it would be difficult to find a clearer presentation of the content of the different books of the New Testament, or one in which there is less effort to prove any particular thesis. Professor Gilbert, as has been noted, is still consistent with his *Revelation of Jesus* on the point of the ideal preëxistence of Christ, but this as a question of exegesis based upon the Jewish doctrine of the idea of pre-existence of the Messiah. For a work on biblical theology the volume is astonishingly free from critical vagaries, and it would be hard to find a book in which radicalism of any sort is less manifest. It is all but impossible to find Professor Gilbert even in the attitude of advocate. That so sane and scholarly and neutral a study should have been considered as a destroyer of the faith is perplexing.

S. M.

Christian Life and Theology; or, The Contribution of Christian Experience to the System of Evangelical Doctrine. By FRANK HUGH FOSTER, PH.D., D.D. Chicago and New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1900. Pp. 286. \$1.50.

The task which the author sets for himself is to develop the essential doctrines of evangelical Christianity from the starting-point of